

Success Story

RICHMOND DISTRICT OFFICE

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VA BBQ: A big hit at the Central VA Franchise EXPO



When Beaverdam, Va., resident Rick Ivey began work as a dishwasher at 14, he had no idea he was beginning a path into the restaurant food and service industry that would lead to founding a chain of fast food barbeque restaurants with 11 locations already open and more than 43 more sites in development.

His franchise system, *Virginia Barbeque*, one of approximately 70 Virginia based franchises, is known for its authentic southern barbeque served with a focus on speed and value. The average order time takes less than five minutes and a family of four can eat for less than twenty dollars.

Critics are raving about Virginia Barbeque's fare, declaring it "The best barbeque on the planet" (Walter Witt, WWBT-TV, the NBC affiliate in Richmond, VA. 2008), "The Region's Best Barbeque" (Richmond Magazine 2005), "4 of 4 star rating" & "Editors' Pick" (Washington Post City Guide 2007), "The best barbeque they ever had," (North of the James Magazine 2006) and "Simply the best Barbeque in the Region" (Free Lance Star 2004).

During his 25 years in the restaurant industry, Ivey worked his way up through the ranks of several large hospitality companies including Aramark, Hilton, Radisson and Sheraton, until he reached the pinnacle of his industry by being certified as one of the nation's 2,000 Executive Chefs. He has held this distinction for the last 10 years.

One of the biggest obstacles Ivey had to deal with in his professional career, he said, was "trying to find a way to balance work and family." Living in a rural area meant long commutes to the commercial centers, on top of long hours in the commercial kitchens. His first solution to this problem was to create Ivey's Catering and install a complete commercial catering kitchen attached to his home so he and his wife could always be there for their young children while preparing the food. Unfortunately, they still had to leave their family to serve the high-end catering clients—with his wife, Nina Ivey, always dressed up and out front, greeting everybody and serving, with Rick in the back, cooking like a madman.

Ivey knew he would have to do more, especially if he wanted to spend most of the day with his children. It was after a barbeque catering gig came through, by far the most money and low-maintenance meal he had ever prepared for a catering event, when he decided to open a chain of barbeque restaurants. This, he figured, could pretty much run itself once it was up-and-going, and he and his wife would not have to be there all the time to oversee everything. He knew this would be a complex business proposition and he would need help. Luckily for Ivey, he met Brian Baker, Executive Director of the **Rappahannock Small Business Development Center (SBDC)**, a cooperative effort of the private sector, the educational community and federal, state and local governments designed to provide management assistance to current and prospective small business owners.

Beginning in early 2005, Baker met with Ivey once a month and helped him with the initial planning of the barbeque franchise company. They worked on the mission, vision and initial goals to get it off the ground. Baker

helped Ivey create his first business plan, review other websites of similar companies to understand what content Ivey would need on his site, and reviewed growth rates of similar franchises to project what growth rate Ivey could initially expect. The success of their collaboration was recognized by the Fredericksburg Regional Chamber of Commerce in 2005, which honored Ivey with its “Entrepreneur of the Year” award. This award “acknowledges an individual for excellence in the start up of a new business.”

Ivey’s business strength has always been that he finds out who the best experts are, and then he learns as much as possible from them and implements their best practices into his business model. “I find that those who are the best in their field want to help others who are still climbing their way to the top. There is no competitiveness there, just pure altruism and a willingness to share what they know,” explained Ivey.

In addition to the assistance Rick received from the SBDC and Brian Baker, his mentors and business advisors include Fred Deluca, Founder of Subway; Steve Greenbaum, Founder and CEO of PostNet International and Chairman of the International Franchise Association (IFA) 2008; Dick Rennick, Founder, American Leak Detection, Past Chairman, IFA; Matthew Shay, President/CEO, IFA; and Ray Titus, Founder/CEO of World Franchise Group including Sign Rama, EmbroidMe, Billboard Connections and Franchise Mart.

Rick and Virginia Barbeque were both a big hit at the **recent 2008 Central Virginia Franchise & Financing Expo**, held in Richmond VA. Virginia Barbeque was not only a exhibitor handing out samples of his product, Rich was also a highlighted speaker at one of the seminars for potential franchisees. This event was a popular resource with the community, educating over 825 potential franchise entrepreneurs on the merits of owning a franchise. It was initiated by the SBA’s Richmond District Office and the Greater Richmond SBDC as the principal host for this event with the International Franchising Association (IFA) as the lead event sponsor. within addition, SBA’s Franchise Registry, the Virginia SBDC Network, SCORE, and New Visions New Ventures Women’s Business Center participated as co-sponsors of this hugely successful event. SBA’s new Franchise Registry is a partnership with FRANdata and a prime example of helping small businesses owners through cooperation between government and industry. Although not a member yet, Rick is planning on registering with the franchise registry in the near future citing it’s many benefits.

One of Ivey’s favorite benefits of running a barbeque restaurant is that he can donate his barbeque to charity events, which turns routine public events into true community experiences with a family feel. Ivey has donated his barbeque to such events as Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boy Scouts of America, Boys and Girls Club, FORD-Fredericksburg Off-Road Duathlon, Friends of the Rappahannock, Greater Fredericksburg Habitat for Humanity Affiliate Juvenile Diabetes Foundation and the March of Dimes.